PUBLICATIONS OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION BOARD

OCCASIONAL PAPERS, No. 1

THE COUNTRY SCHOOL OF TO-MORROW

BY
FREDERICK T. GATES

163

GENERAL EDUCATION BOARD
17 Battery Place New York City
1917

of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission came forward. They had caught the schools in session, and photographed teacher and pupils, grouped in front of the school house. In some instances all, teacher and pupils alike; were suffering from hookworm disease. Their emaciated, misshapen, or bloated bodies, their sad, pale listless, hopeless faces, marked with habitual suffering, faces which no art could charm into a smile that would not be ghastly, told the story of disease and neglect. There are well nigh or quite two million of these children in the South, between six and sixteen years of age, weighed down, arrested, and stunted physically and mentally by this disease, many thousands each year finding relief from it in death. This number must be multiplied by the indirect toll of increased fatality in other diseases, traceable solely to this complication. Sixty thousand people, most of them children, have already been treated in North Carolina alone, and the work has been conducted systematically in a few counties only. Here is a word picture drawn by one of the State Superintendents of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission, of the crowds, often numbering several hundreds, which throng his improvised dispensaries:

"The people come from far and near, from all stations in life. They come on trains, by boat, in wagons, carts, and buggies. Many come on foot from ten to twenty miles. Some, too weak to make the journey and falling by the wayside, are picked up by passing vehicles and brought in. Some, unable to stand or sit, are brought in on stretchers. The results following the treatment are indeed marvelous. A gain in weight of a pound a day is common. To see the crowds, to witness their transformation from invalidism, wasted ambition, and poverty, to health, happiness, activity, and prosperity, brings to one's mind the miracles of the New Testament, and the healing of the multitudes."

The inspectors not confining their work to hookworm disease, have given all the children in many schools a general physical examination. They report 40 to 60 per cent. of the children defective and more or less disabled from other preventable and curable ailments.

5

MISERIES OF RURAL LIFE

The Farm Demonstrators of the General Education Board, of which there are several hundreds in the South, complete the series of pictures of rural life in the more neglected sections — of worn out soil, inefficient cultivation, scanty crop, abandoned field overgrown with bushes, deeply washed and gullied hillside, rotten orchard, sprawling fence, tumble-down houses, with unkempt and littered surroundings. The picture is emphasized by contrast. Growing side by side were shown in the same picture on one hand the thin, scant, meagre crop of the one-mule farmer, and the rich, luxuriant, bountiful harvest of the farm demonstrator, in the same field.

Such are the pictures too often found among our everywhere neglected rural folk — among people of our own land, of our own blood, of Anglo-Saxon lineage and intelligence. To me they tell a story unmatched in pathos, resistless in appeal. No one can look on scenes like these and turn lightly away. One is bound to pause and to muse while the fire burns. For this condition of things exists to-day and now, in spite of the fact that, for decade after decade, these people have enjoyed the advantages of a common school system, of county and state superintendents of public instruction, of normal schools, of high schools in all the centres, of Christian colleges founded by denominational zeal, of state universities supported by taxation, the whole supplemented by agricultural and mechanical colleges founded by the United States Government. Also, from the viewpoint of rigidly orthodox Puritan Christianity, these communities have been made Christian statistically in larger percentage than any other equal portion of mankind.

Here, then, is a vast, various, costly educational system of a Christian people, unrelated directly or in any effective way even indirectly to the earthly life and needs of those for whom it exists and by whose sacrifices it is, in the main, supported — a putting asunder of what God hath joined together, *disastrous alike to both.* Here are shepherds and there are sheep, suffering from hunger, devoured and torn by wolves, and neither knows the other. Can shepherds and sheep be brought together in mutual love and service?

A VISION OF THE REMEDY

Is there aught of remedy for this neglect of rural life? Let us, at least, yield ourselves to the gratifications of a beautiful dream that there is. In our dream, we have limitless resources, and the people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hand. The present educational conventions fade from our minds; and, unhampered by tradition, we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive rural folk. We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning or of science. We are not to raise up from among them authors, orators, poets, or men of letters. We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters, musicians. Nor will we cherish even the humbler ambition to raise up from among them lawyers, doctors, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we now have ample supply. We are to follow the admonitions of the good apostle, who said, "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low degree." And generally, with respect to these high things, all that we shall try to do is just to create presently about these country homes an atmosphere and conditions such, that, if by chance a child of genius should spring up from the soil, that genius will surely bud and not be blighted. Putting, therefore, all high things quite behind us, we turn with a sense of freedom and delight to the simple, lowly, needful things that promise well for rural life. For the task that we set before ourselves is a very simple as well as a very beautiful one : to train these people as we find them for a perfectly ideal life just where they are — yes, ideal, for we shall allow ourselves to be extravagant since we are only dreaming; call it idyllic, if you like — an idyllic life under the skies and within the horizon, however narrow, where they first open their eyes. We are to try to make that life, just where it is, healthful, intelligent, efficient, to fill it with thought and purpose, and with a gracious social culture not without its joys.

EVERY INDUSTRY IN A CURRICULUM

Let us take, for illustration, as the rural school unit, a territory or township perhaps six miles square, thirty-six square miles, containing some twenty-five thousand acres and at present one

hundred and fifty families or more. We shall need a group of school buildings, and these we will place as near the centre as possible and for the more distant pupils arrange daily conveyance in groups. We shall need very ample grounds, many acres. We will return to this, for just now we prefer to conceive our school grounds in the ultimate purpose of our work as embracing the entire township, since our school in its aim includes everybody, old as well as young; it is to be in session all the year round, and everyone shall have something yet to learn always before him. Every industry in the district finds place in our curriculum. Every kitchen, barn, dairy, shop, is a laboratory for our school. The growing crops, the orchards, the vineyards, the gardens, the forests, the streams, the domestic animals, nay, even the tools of every farm, are part of our scientific equipment. The horizon forms the walls of our museum of natural history and the sky its roof, and all the life within is material and specimen for our study.

HEALTH THE FIRST LESSON

Our first plans shall be for health, as the basis of all well being and well doing. We shall ferret out the local causes of ill health in the family and in the community, also in plant and animal life. We shall call to our aid, of course, the experts, from the chemical and agricultural colleges and universities, our schools of forestry and of veterinary medicine. They shall examine and report. They shall lecture and demonstrate before us and be in constant correspondence with us. We shall submit to them our too difficult problems and they shall solve them for us.

Closely associated with health is the daily supply of food. "I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat." It should be sufficiently varied, regularly provided, suitably and appetizingly cooked. Every girl and every boy shall be taught what to eat, how to eat, and how to cook. At least three times a day throughout his life, every one of us must eat, and the question of healthful and nutritious diet is perhaps the most important single question in life. Nor lives the man to whom this very thing is not by Providence designed to be no inconsiderable part of his daily satisfactions. The dear old lady came much nearer the heart of things than many a divinity professor when, being about to pass to her reward and

her pastor asking her which of the divine mercies she felt, at such a time, to have been most precious, she replied, "Well, I have always enjoyed my victuals."

Then comes the question of shelter. "I was a stranger and ye took Me in." We shall teach all that it is necessary to know about the sanitation of a home, from cellar to garret, the need of spotless cleanliness within it, of neatness, taste, and beauty about it. We shall show the value of ventilation, light, warmth and the best methods of securing them. We shall study the question of drainage, sewerage, the disposal of waste, the water supply, infection, its source and prevention. We shall plan model kitchens and model sanitary arrangements, model rural homes. We shall render the home and all its surroundings tasteful, comfortable, and healthful.

The matter of clothing shall not be neglected. "Naked, and ye clothed Me." We shall study cloth, its methods of manufacture, tests of its quality. Every person shall be able to distinguish between the spurious and the genuine and to calculate economy in clothing to a nicety. Every girl shall be taught to cut, fit, and make with her own hands the ordinary clothing of the family. The matter of sanitary clothing is not unimportant. We call to mind that, for a century past, one *Titanic*, at the least, full of children, with some adults, has gone down every month in the South, for lack of knowledge of a few simple facts about the hygiene of rural homes and their surroundings, and for lack of proper clothing for the feet of the children. Our work on hygiene shall be very thorough, penetrative and persistent, North as well as South. We shall have periodic examinations of all the members of our school by qualified experts. We shall teach the hygiene of the various members of the body, the hygiene of the eye, the teeth, the digestive system, the hygiene of sex, of marriage, of infancy, of age. "I was sick, and ye visited Me."

LESSONS IN FARMING

So much for health, for food, for clothing, and for shelter. But rich delights still remain to us. We have only as yet laid the foundations. We are now prepared to teach these children to conquer and to harness nature within their horizon to their service

and to the service of the world. The farm demonstrators of the General Education Board in the South are securing on demonstration farms in each state about double the average yield of cotton per acre. Their knowledge of seed selection and cotton culture, if universally applied, would double the cotton crop and bring to the cotton raiser at the very least $240,000,000 added profits annually. One remarks in passing that this possible increase of $240,000,000 net profit on cotton alone in one year is perhaps four times the entire money value of all the property which all the institutions of higher learning in the cotton belt have amassed in two generations, so complete is their isolation from the life and interests of the people.

The corn clubs of the General Education Board are demonstrating throughout the South that from two to five times the present annual yield per acre may be won from the soil. The same is possible of potatoes. The canning clubs of the same Board are showing profits of from $100 to $250 per acre for the girls of the family. It is very certain that scientific farming, conducted as a business, will multiply the annual net profits of the Southern farmer by at least four. It was a Southern state — North Carolina — that won at the Paris Exposition the first prize for the best apples in the world. In our dream, every horizon, from Virginia to Texas and from Maine to California, shall be studied with regard to its possibilities, both in abundance and variety of products; and similar climates and soils the world over, including the Orient, shall be explored and ransacked for adapted fruits, vegetables, grasses, cereals of value.

We are perhaps ready now to go back to our central school, with its very ample grounds. Ample they will need to be, for the school itself is to be, within the limits of child life, a microcosm of the life of the whole community. Not, indeed, of the life of the community as it is, for the adult population for a time will lag far behind the children. Our school shall be a picture in little of the community as it is to be, in what we called its ideal, its idyllic life. The children themselves shall form a community, with allotments and employments, a common social and perhaps a common manufacturing and commercial life of their own, on these ample grounds. They shall perform for themselves, under the guidance of skilled instructors, those agricultural operations as arts which the best

science of agriculture shall prescribe. They shall all be demonstrators of the highest achievable results in field, garden, kitchen, sewing room, orchard, vineyard, pasture, dairy, lawn, and meadow, not forgetful of the flowers and of the beauty of the landscape.

TEACHING WHAT CHILDREN WANT TO KNOW

As for the school house, we cannot now even plan the building, or rather, group of buildings. Quite likely we would not recognize the future group if the plan were put before us to-day, so different will it be from the traditional school house. For of one thing we may be sure : Our schools will no longer resemble, in their methods and their discipline, institutions of penal servitude. They will not be, as now, places of forced confinement, accompanied by physical and mental torture during six hours of the day. Strait-jackets, now called educational, will no longer thwart and stifle the physical and mental activities of the child. We shall, on the contrary, take the child from the hand of God, the crown and glory of His creative work, by Him pronounced good, and by Jesus blessed. We shall seize the restless activities of his body and mind and, instead of repressing them, we shall stimulate those activities, as the natural forces of growth in action. We shall seek to learn the instincts of the child and reverently to follow and obey them as guides in his development; for those instincts are the Voice of God within him, teaching us the direction of his unfolding. We will harness the natural activities of the child to his natural aspirations, and guide and help him in their realization. The child naturally wishes to do the things that adults do, and therefore the operations of adult life form the imitative plays of the child. The child lives in a dreamland, full of glowing hopes of the future, and seeks anticipatively to live to-day the life of his manhood.

So we will organize our children into a little community and teach them to do in a perfect way the things their fathers and mothers are doing in an imperfect way, in the home, in the shop, on the farm. We shall train the child for the life before him by methods which reach the perfection of their adaptation only when the child shall not be able to distinguish between the pleasures of his school work and the pleasures of his play.

II

NO MORE BRANDING WITH THREE R'S

But how about the three R's? The moment we cease to pursue the three R's as abstract ends, disassociated with anything which the child has experienced, and bring them forward only when and as the child needs to use them in his business, he will pick them up as readily as ball and bat. We are under no extreme necessity of penning children in a room and chaining them to a bench and there branding the three R's upon them. The difficulties of school life, disciplinary and otherwise, are of the teacher's making. They belong to a false method that has become traditional. How do we teach children to use carpenter's tools, for illustration? By studying pictures of these tools in books or by putting the tools themselves into the hands of the children, with material to work upon, and things to make? Precisely so with the three R's. They are nothing in the world but tools. Give them to the children as tools that they now need in something definitely put before them, and they will learn to use them easily and naturally.

THE SCHOOL A COÖPERATIVE DEMOCRACY

But the life is more than meat, as the body is more than raiment. It is in the souls of the children that our purpose rests. Nature studies shall acquaint every child with all that he can take in of that portion of nature which lies about him, in the waters below him, in the clouds and skies above him. The children shall learn the names of all the trees, their leaves, the peculiarities of their branching, their methods of growth, their value and use; the names also of all the wild birds, their songs and their habits. Curiosity shall be aroused about the mysteries in the waters, in the fields, and in the forests. Insect life not less than plant life shall disclose wondrous secrets to their eager eyes, so that the minds of the children shall be filled with interesting themes of thought, and their glance, wherever it falls, shall beam with intelligence and inquiry. So the children shall be kept from torpor and vacancy of mind. The breath of life shall be breathed into their clay, and they shall at last become living souls.

Ruskin has somewhere said that education does not consist in teaching people to know what they do not know, but in teaching

them to behave as they do not behave mentally, morally, physically, socially. In our little microcosm of life, the children shall form an ideal society. Their life shall be developed and perfected individually through a close-knit social life. The child shall not be riveted to his separate spot; he shall not be forbidden to speak or to whisper; he shall not be warned not to afford help to any unfortunate near by; the instinct to render first aid to the injured, so to speak, shall not be repressed. Far from that, the first social principle of our school shall be to encourage the children to aid each other as freely as possible. Indeed, much of the teaching will be done under supervision by means of mutual assistance of the pupils. Doubtless the pupil groups will have their own pupil captains, as they have their baseball captains. This free social life of the children during all the hours of the school, conducted mainly out of doors, will form an ideal laboratory of manners and of character, affording opportunity for the sweetest social culture, courtesy, helpfulness, gentleness, deference, truth, reverence, honor, chivalry. These virtues shall form the breath and atmosphere of our child community.

THE ART OF RECREATION

A new science or a new art, just now in process, perhaps not yet come to self-consciousness, shall be fully developed for our schools — the art of recreation for young and old, for all pursuits, for all seasons, for both sexes, indoors, out of doors. Some sweet, healthful, happy, adapted recreation shall enter into the programme, not occasionally, but every day, for young and old alike. Ultimately, there will be professors of popular recreation. They shall be sent to us from the colleges, to teach us all the ways of relief from strain and tedium, precisely adapted. And all together we shall have our weekly half holiday for community recreations.

Beauty, too, we shall cultivate no less than recreation. It is delightful to know that the sense of beauty in sight and sound is instinctive in mankind, ineradicable, fundamental as hunger. Deeper than intelligence it lies in our physical being, and runs down from mankind through many orders to the very insects. The sense of beauty in our rural children, as yet almost uncultivated and undeveloped, is a promising field of joy and blessedness.

Accordingly, there shall be music, vocal and instrumental. We shall have an orchestra, if possible a band, a chorus — and dancing shall be taught in utmost grace of movement, beginning with the littlest children, singly and in groups. The laws of beauty are indeed little known as yet, but scenes of beauty shall everywhere be pointed out and analyzed and dwelt upon to the full, and the art of drawing them shall be offered to all, as a means of close observation, of analysis, and of more perfect recognition and enjoyment of beauty.

So we have brought our little community at last to art and refinement. Such a people will demand literature and a library of their own. And when they begin to select and to read good books for themselves, our particular task will be done. We may leave them then, I think, to their natural local leaders. We have taught them how to live the life of the farm, of the fireside, of the rural community, to make it healthful, intelligent, efficient, productive, social, and no longer isolated. We have wakened sluggishness to interest and inquiry. We have given the mind, in the intelligent conduct of the daily vocation, in the study and enjoyment of nature, material for some of the joys of the intellectual life. We have trained the eye for beauty, the ear for harmony, the soul for gentleness and courtesy, and made possible to these least of Christ's brethren the life of love and joy and admiration. We have made country life more desirable than city life and raised up in the country the natural aristocracy of the nation.

Such is our dream. Must it be altogether a dream? Surely, it ought to be and, therefore, will be, realized, if not in its processes — and I have described processes at all mainly for pictorial effect — certainly in its results. If it be an achievement beyond our present civilization, then our more enlightened and capable children will certainly accomplish it. Come, in the end, it must and will.

But the cost? The cost in money will be limited; the gain in money will be limitless. The farm demonstrations of scientific agriculture in the South are showing average gains of $10 to $30 per acre on soil cultivated by demonstration methods. The farmers themselves, therefore, could well afford in the end to pay the expense. The railroads alone could do it, out of their increased traffic created thereby. A selected group of manufacturers,

another group of exporters and importers, another group of wholesale merchants, another of retail merchants, could each afford to pay the whole expense, as a commercial investment for profit. And so the state, by general taxation of land, industry, trade, and commerce (for all would be alike benefited) could well afford to foot the bill; or the group of states forming the nation could individu ally pay.

UTILIZING THE COLLEGE-BRED YOUTH

We shall have to look to our colleges and universities to furnish teachers. We have elaborate and effective apparatus, worked with fervid zeal, for the world-wide extension of our civilization. Also, for the extension downward of the blessings of civilization through the masses of our own people, we have powerful, costly, and effective apparatus, educational and religious, all being run with much acclaim. But the machine, as we have seen, seems to be running on the reverse gears. Instead of carrying the fruits of civilization downward to the homes of the people, the system as now run is accurately adjusted to take out of the homes of the people a few of the choicer youths, to civilize these and to carry them to the top, there to group and cohere as social cream. Thus, the common school is adapted to select pupils for the high school. The high school is adjusted to select and send up annually to the college a quota of students prepared in the fourteen units required for college entrance by the Carnegie pension system. The college, in turn, finds its ends in the sheepskin and the cap and gown.

The ancient scribes of Jerusalem likewise, not a religious order like the Pharisees, were a learned order. They were graduates of one or the other of the two ancient seats of learning at Jerusalem, founded in the days of Nehemiah. Their long robes were, in fact, the academic gown — then, as now, the badge of learning. Beware of the scribes, who desire to walk in academic gowns and receive salutations in the marketplaces and the chief places in the synagogue and the first places at social functions. Their learning, their doctors' degrees, their academic gowns, find their end in livelihood, in personal distinction, in social advancement, and not in the enrichment and uplift of the common life. Such was Christ's criticism of the formal learning of his day. The useful-

ness of the college too often ends quite precisely when and where it ought to begin. The shepherds are trained, but the sheep go shepherdless. When the spirit of education shall be changed, as it will be, then the direction in which the machine works will be reversed, and the colleges will studiously employ themselves in carrying civilization with all its blessings downward to the people on the soil. If schools of rural life spring up in numbers, the colleges will not be slow to adopt them and to nourish them with all that is best and most helpful from their ample store. Our leading educators are eager to escape from outworn traditions, in which they are enmeshed. The college campus will extend to the boundary line of the state, so as to include all its industries, its farms and its households. Some changes there will be, perhaps, in the curriculum, some additions, quite likely in the direction of applied science, some transfers of emphasis, no lowering, but rather full high advancing of standards of scholarship, culture, discipline, research, because all will be dedicated to high and rewarding ends.

In the state of Wisconsin, now perhaps the best governed of all our states, the University writes the laws that go on the statute books, University professors guide and control the main departments of state administration and inquiry; there is no limit to the financial resources which a grateful people are placing at the disposal of learning, thus consecrated to the service of the commonwealth. Our more ancient seats of learning pride themselves justly on their antiquity, on their dignity, on the reverence in which they are held, on the great names that have been and are associated with them. But it is yet theirs to reign over empires now undreamed; to inherit a kingdom that has awaited them from the foundation of the world; to write the laws of obedient states; to know the love of a reverent, grateful, and generous people; to

> "Scatter plenty o'er a smiling land
> And read their history in a nation's eyes."